



Men Who Buy Sex
with Adolescent Girls:
A Scientific Research Study

February, 2010

Executive Summary

- This report details a first-of-its-kind study to quantify, describe, and understand demand for CSEC in Georgia. It paints a clear picture of the adult men who exploit adolescent females by paying for sex with them. The study involved an innovative survey methodology that yielded 218 completed useable surveys over a 2-month period in fall 2009.
- Almost half these men are the age 30-39, with the next largest group being men under age 30. The mean age is 33 and the median 31. The youngest survey participant was 18, and the oldest was 67.
- The data clearly debunk the myth that CSEC is a problem relegated to the urban core. Men who respond to advertisements for sex with young females come from all over metro Atlanta, the geographic market where the advertisements in this study were targeted.
- Not only are 65% of men who buy sex with young females doing so in and around suburban metro Atlanta, but 9% of men who buy sex with young females in metro Atlanta gave their location as near the airport. This finding is consistent with advocates' claims that travel and tourism play a major role in sustaining CSEC.
- The numbers are staggering — 12,400 men each month in Georgia pay for sex with a young female, 7,200 of whom end up exploiting an adolescent female.
- These men account for 8,700 paid sex acts with adolescent females each month, which means that each adolescent female is exploited an average of 3 times per day.
- Over 700,000 men have bought sex with females in Georgia, including both “young” and “not young” females. With approximately 3 million adult men in Georgia, this study finds that 23% have purchased sex with females, and 20,700 men do so in any given month.
- While many of the men who exploit these children are not seeking adolescent females per se, the study also shows that just under half are willing to pay for sex with a young female even when they know for sure she is an adolescent.
- Local, state, and national lawmakers need to be made aware of the magnitude of the demand for CSEC, as well as the nature of the demand. Advocates need to debunk the myth that CSEC is perpetrated by a small number of “sexual predators.”

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Introduction and Methodology

A movement is afoot in Georgia and across the nation to stop the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). In recent years this effort has been a data-driven one in Georgia, with advocates developing strategies based on scientific data on the number of adolescent females statewide who are commercially sexually exploited each month.¹ These data — which recently showed that over 400 adolescent girls are prostituted each month in Georgia — are important for tracking CSEC victims trends.

However, the data stop short of describing or otherwise assessing the men who exploit children by paying for sex with adolescent girls. This study, which involved collecting and analyzing scientific data on men who buy sex with adolescent females, fills an important void for advocates who seek to end CSEC.

Background

It is understood by advocates who work to combat CSEC in Georgia that *because* this form of sexual exploitation is commercial, it is sustained through the economic law of supply and demand. We already have scientific data on the adolescent girls who are the “supply” in this criminal marketplace (CSEC victims), but before now were lacking data on the the “demand” side of the equation — the men who buy sex with with adolescent females.

Having data on men who commercially sexually exploit female children is vitally important to stopping CSEC. Economics tells us that the elimination of demand will prevent the production of supply; yet, the elimination of *supply* will do nothing to prevent *demand*. Therefore, in order to stop CSEC in Georgia and elsewhere, advocates need to be able to develop effective demand-side strategies. In order to do this, they need reliable scientific data on the men who comprise the demand side of the economic equation.

In 2008, the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation published a first-of-its-kind research study on men who purchase sex.² This scientific study involved in-depth interviews with 113 men who purchase sex, and looked at factors that possibly contribute to men deciding to buy sex. While this study is incredibly helpful at beginning to understand why men buy sex — and in fact was vitally important in informing the current study, it falls short of accomplishing CSEC advocates’ goals for a couple of key reasons:

1. The men who participated in the study did so knowingly, and therefore would be extremely unlikely to divulge any information about buying sex from children.

¹ Source: The Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families

² Durchslag, R. & Goswami, S. (2008). *Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex*. Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

2. The study looked primarily at psychological and life history determinants of the decision to purchase sex as an adult. While this is valuable to examine, searching for individual “abnormalities” will always lead CSEC advocates astray; CSEC can only exist as a commercial enterprise if it is a *sadly normal* practice in our society. The same can be said of prostitution broadly, and the results of the Chicago study bear this truth out. Men who purchase sex tend to come from normal backgrounds and seem no more likely to suffer from apparent pathologies than the rest of the adult male population. There simply appears to be no magic bullet in determining what individual qualities and experiences lead a man to purchase sex. Prostitution is a societal problem, not an individual problem.

Study Goals and Methodology

With the Chicago demand study in-hand, we set out to conduct a new study of men who buy sex that accomplishes the following objectives:

1. Collects data among men who *are not aware* that they are being researched
2. Collects data from men who are purchasing sex with adolescent females³
3. Elucidates how men who are seeking to buy sex end up exploiting adolescent females
4. Assesses strategic approaches to preventing CSEC specifically

We accomplished these objectives through an innovative survey methodology that yielded 218 completed useable surveys over a 2-month period in fall 2009. While most survey methodologies involve the surveyor selecting and contacting prospective interviewees, we felt that any methodology using this basic approach would be flawed because the participant would always know — or at least suspect — he is being surveyed.⁴

Instead, we decided to develop a methodological approach where participants would voluntarily contact us *without suspecting that they are participating in a research study*. To do this, we placed advertisements on Craigslist.com, Backpage.com, and other Internet sites commonly used for advertising paid sex services. Our advertisements mimicked other ads on these sites; the text content crudely described paid sex services with a young female for anyone who called the advertised phone number. In addition, we included a picture of a young female in the advertisement — just as nearly all other internet advertisements do.

Why “young” instead of underage? Any advertisement that explicitly mentions paid sex with an adolescent is removed by these internet sites instantly and/or automatically. Advertisements

³ While adolescent males are also victims of commercial sexual exploitation, we focused solely on men who buy sex from adolescent females. All indications are that adolescent females are far more likely to be victimized this way than adolescent males.

⁴ The major downside to relying on survey participants to contact us instead of the other way around is that we have less control over the representativeness of the resulting sample. While we acknowledge that this methodology is imperfect, it is nevertheless a major step forward in researching a population that defies conventional research methodologies. Furthermore, the characteristics of the resulting sample show good diversity by age, geographic location, experience with purchasing sex, sex purchase preferences, and others.

featuring adolescents are rarely labeled in text as such. Instead, advertisement creators rely on pictures of the females and young text descriptors to convey her approximate age to prospective customers. We used these same techniques in our advertisements, consistent with the age-rating methodology used in the ongoing tracking study to monitor female CSEC victims in Georgia.⁵

At the same time, we had highly-trained professional interviewers answering the multiple phone lines associated with these advertisements, so that when someone responded to the advertisement he would be “interviewed” at that time. These are not traditional, in-depth interviews, however. Instead, we developed a simple set of interview guidelines that allowed us to collect key pieces of data from each participant as he discussed with us what sex services he was looking to purchase. We collected information that was usual and ordinary during the course of a discussion to buy sex; anything else might have tipped off participants. Our interviewer posed as an “operator”; a person who brokers the purchase of multiple females.

This is a common situation for men who buy sex from females pictured on the internet. Very often the phone is answered by an operator who can either connect the customer with the female pictured in the advertisement, or with a variety of other females as well. The job of the operator is to figure out what the customer wants, and which female is available in the area who closely matches his preferences. This is exactly what our operator interviewers did. Except, when it came time to connect the customer with a specific female, our operator informed the customer that “after checking, the female she thought was available for him was not available after all.” This allowed us to terminate each interview without further action or consequence to us or the participant.

Each interview was recorded, coded for analysis, and then destroyed in order to ensure confidentiality. No information about the participant’s name, phone number, or other personally-identifying information was recorded in the final dataset. The following section of the report details the information we collected, as well as the implications of this information for strategically addressing the demand side of CSEC.

⁵ Source: The Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families

Results

This section of the report contains the results of the scientific survey of 218 men who buy sex with young females in Georgia.⁶ This sample size allows us to look closely at a variety of respondent subgroups, as well as to look for relationships among variables in the study. The large sample size alone is a dramatic improvement over many related research studies.

The topics covered during respondent interviews are grouped into the three subsections that follow. The first, “Who Responds to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females?,” reports descriptive information about the men who participated in the study, as well as statistical extrapolations for men statewide. The next subsection is “How Men Buy Sex with Adolescent Females,” and details *how* and *how many* men purchase sex with females under age 18. The final subsection is “Implications for Demand-Side Interventions,” which empirically assesses CSEC prevention strategies.

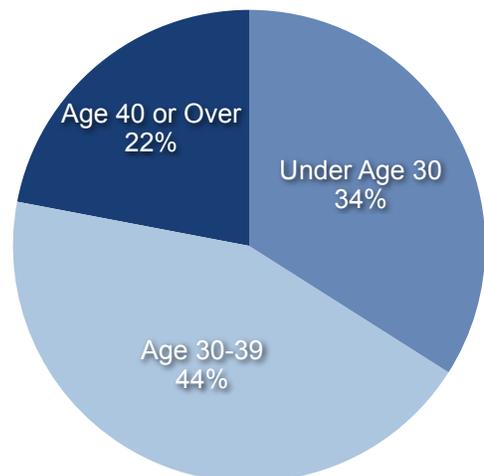
Who Responds to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females?

An important consideration in evaluating these survey data is the larger population represented by the study sample. The sample is of men who responded to advertisements for *young* females, not females of older adult ages.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of men who responded to advertisements for sex with young females. Almost half these men are the age 30-39, with the next largest group being men under age 30. The mean age is 33 and the median 31. The youngest survey participant was 18, and the oldest was 67.

Men who respond to advertisements for sex with young females come from all over metro Atlanta, the geographic market where the advertisements were targeted. The data clearly debunk the myth that CSEC is a problem relegated to the urban core. In metro Atlanta, a handy way to denote the area’s urban core is *inside the perimeter* (IIP). “The perimeter” refers to I-285, a freeway that encapsulates the metro area’s dense urban development, including the City of Atlanta. On the other hand, *outside the perimeter* (OTP) refers to suburban areas in metro Atlanta surrounding the urban core.

Figure 1. Ages of Men Who Respond to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females



⁶ Because the sampling procedure used in this study is neither traditional nor purely random in nature, it defies traditional measures of sampling adequacy. For example, since respondents contacted us rather than the other way around, there is no response rate statistic to compute. And, while it is not technically advisable to use a margin of sampling error statistic in describing nonrandom samples, it is not unheard of to do so. Computed for this study, the margin of sampling error is $\pm 5\%$.

Figure 2. Geographic Locations of Men Who Respond to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females

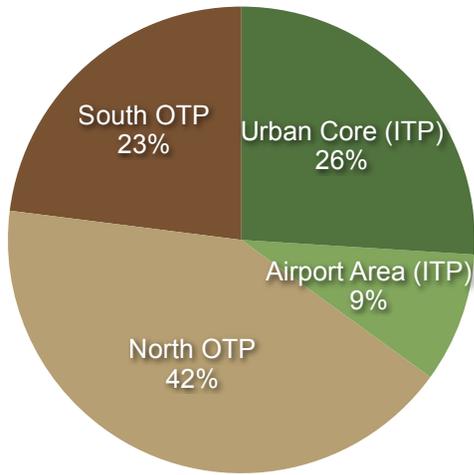


Figure 3. Incall/Outcall Preferences of Men Who Respond to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females

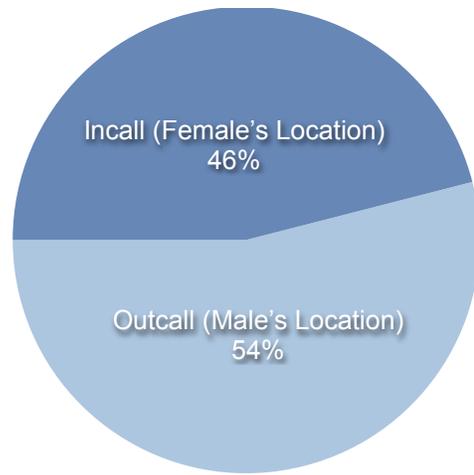


Figure 2 shows that not only are 65% of men who buy sex with young females doing so in and around suburban metro Atlanta, but 9% of men who buy sex with young females in urban Atlanta gave their location as near the airport. This finding is consistent with advocates' claims travel and tourism play an important role in sustaining CSEC⁷.

Figure 3 indicates that about half of men who purchase sex with young females prefer “incall” service (at the female’s location) over “outcall” (at the purchaser’s location), though there are no clear patterns in the data to figure out why men might choose one over the other.

While this descriptive information is helpful in yet again showing that that men who purchase sex come from all parts of the metro area and represent all ages, it does not tell us how many men overall are involved in purchasing sex with females in Georgia. This study does, however, give us one crucial data point for making these calculations reliably; namely, it tells us the average response rate to advertisements for sex with young females in Georgia.

The process of using these survey data to calculate how many men in Georgia purchase sex with females is analogous to calculating how many people live in a neighborhood by looking at a picture of the neighborhood park on a sunny weekend afternoon. We can count how many people are at the park on that day by carefully examining the photo, but this count will fall far short of the total number of people who live in the neighborhood.

⁷ There is still much to learn about how this issue affects CSEC rates in Georgia, and this study is not designed to assess the impact of travel in great depth. While this 9% *could* have an impact a minimal impact on our overall calculations presented later in this subsection, we do not have enough information to determine this for sure. For this study, we operate under the assumption that Georgia men are just as likely as men from other state to pay for sex when they travel.

However, if we knew the probability that any one individual in the neighborhood was present at the park on that particular afternoon, the probability that any individual in our picture of the park lives in the neighborhood, and the probability that a person at the park made it into our picture, then we could rather easily and reliably calculate how many people live in the neighborhood. Basically, we need to know — not guess — the odds that we took the picture of someone in the neighborhood.

The same logic holds true in this study. By factoring in the following probabilistic information, we are able to arrive at a series of reliable calculations about the full population of men who purchase sex with females across Georgia:

- The average number of unique advertisements for females posted on Internet sites where we posted our advertisements.⁸
- The average percentage of these advertisements that are for sex with young females.⁹
- The probability that a young female advertised on these different Internet sites is actually under the age of 18.¹⁰
- The percentage of men who purchase sex overall who do so through advertisements on Internet websites such as Craigslist.¹¹
- The frequency with which men who purchase sex engage in this activity. This information is highly valuable, as it represents the chance that any man who purchases sex would end up in our study's sample.¹²
- The odds that a man who purchases sex will respond to an advertisement with a young female over an otherwise identical advertisement that did *not* describe the female as young.¹³
- By combining these data arithmetically, we arrive at the following computations:
- 12,400 men buy sex with **young** females in a given month in Georgia; over 27,000 men buy sex with **young** females in Georgia *multiple times per year*.

⁸ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

⁹ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

¹⁰ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

¹¹ In *Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex*, the study found that 34% of men who purchase sex primarily do so through Internet sites such as Craigslist.

¹² In *Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex*, the study found that 7% of men who purchase sex do so several times per week, 5% once per week, 21% several times per month, 20% monthly, 5% every couple of years, 27% a couple of times per year, and 12% once or twice in a lifetime.

¹³ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

- Over 400,000 men in Georgia today have bought sex with a **young** female. Here it is important to remember that a large percentage of men who purchase sex do so once or twice throughout their entire adulthood. Consistent with this notion, of the men who participated in our study who discussed their history purchasing sex, 60% said it was their first time doing so.
- Over 700,000 men in Georgia today have bought sex with females, including both “young” and “not young” females. With approximately 3 million adult men in Georgia, this study finds that 23% have purchased sex with females,¹⁴ and 20,700 men do so in any given month.
- 7,200 men will buy sex with an **adolescent female** in a given month in Georgia; 35% of men who buy sex overall in a month.
- These 7,200 men will account for 8,700 paid sex acts with **adolescent females** each month in Georgia, with an average of 300 acts per day.
- With trend data clearly establishing an average of 100 **adolescent females** commercially sexually exploited on a typical night in Georgia¹⁵, we now know that each **adolescent female** affected by CSEC is sexually exploited by an adult male 3 times per night, on average.

How Men Buy Sex with Adolescent Females

While it is valuable to know *how many* men are responsible for sustaining CSEC in Georgia, we still need to know more clearly *how* men perpetuate this form of exploitation on such a large scale. For many, CSEC is an unfathomable problem because they cannot see why any adult would choose to pay for sex with a child, let alone 7,200 men each month. We find that the answer to this question is quite simple: most men who commercially sexually exploit adolescent females *either don't know or are willing to ignore the possibility that they are having sex with an adolescent female*.

This is a departure from the “sexual predator” theory of CSEC, which says that the practice is perpetuated by men who seek out sex with children knowingly and willingly. After all, how can an adult male have sex with a female and not know she is an adolescent?

Georgia's CSEC tracking study¹⁶ shows just how easy it is for *men and women alike* to mistake the age of a provocatively-posed female. This study shows that, statistically speaking, adolescent females tend to look 6-8 years older than they actually are when dressed provocatively. Considering these findings, it is easier to see how so many adolescent females can be commercially sexually exploited without raising red flags due to their perceived age.

¹⁴ This percentage is slightly higher than the most recent national survey asking men to self-report whether or not they have paid for sex with a female. In this 2004 survey, 15% of men overall reported having ever paid for sex with a female. However, the self-reported nature of the survey raises questions about respondents' honesty. In this same survey, only 34% of men reported having ever visited a “sex website.” <http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/News/story?id=156921>

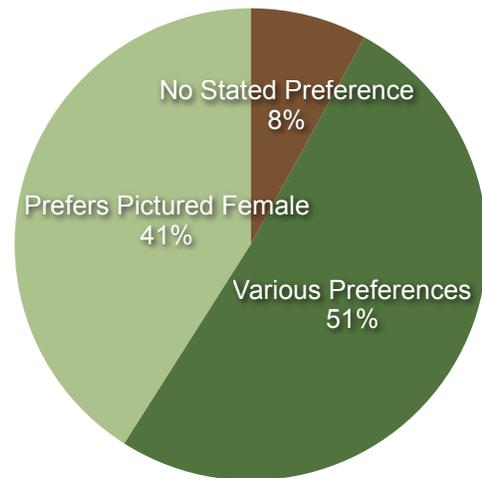
¹⁵ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

¹⁶ Source: The Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families

If this is true, then we would expect to find in the current study that men who purchase sex with young females would very rarely ask for adolescent females specifically and directly, but would instead put themselves in such a position that they are highly likely to pay for sex with an adolescent female. Under this “willful ignorance” theory of CSEC, men most often are *not* trying to pay for sex with an adolescent female per se, but rather a female of any *real* age whose *perceived* age is in her very early 20s. According to this theory, perceived age is more important than real age; the men only care that the female is “young,” and are willfully ignorant of the significant likelihood that a female who looks so young is an adolescent.

The following results help us understand how men come to purchase sex with young females. Figure 4 shows that almost all men who respond to advertisements for sex with young females are willing to discuss at least some form of preference for the type of female with whom he would like to have sex. For slightly less than half of these men, this preference is for the young female pictured in the advertisement.

Figure 4. Preferences of Men Who Respond to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females



One of the most common preferences men cited for the female is her age. Figure 5 shows how the men who participated in the study referenced age in describing their preferred female.

Of these men who responded to advertisements for sex with young females (who represent 67% of all men who purchase sex¹⁷), over half shared *age* preferences for the female whose sex services he wished to buy. Only 6% of these men shared a preference for a female who was *not young*, though it should be noted that 62% of these men nevertheless stated a strong preference for the young female pictured in the advertisement.

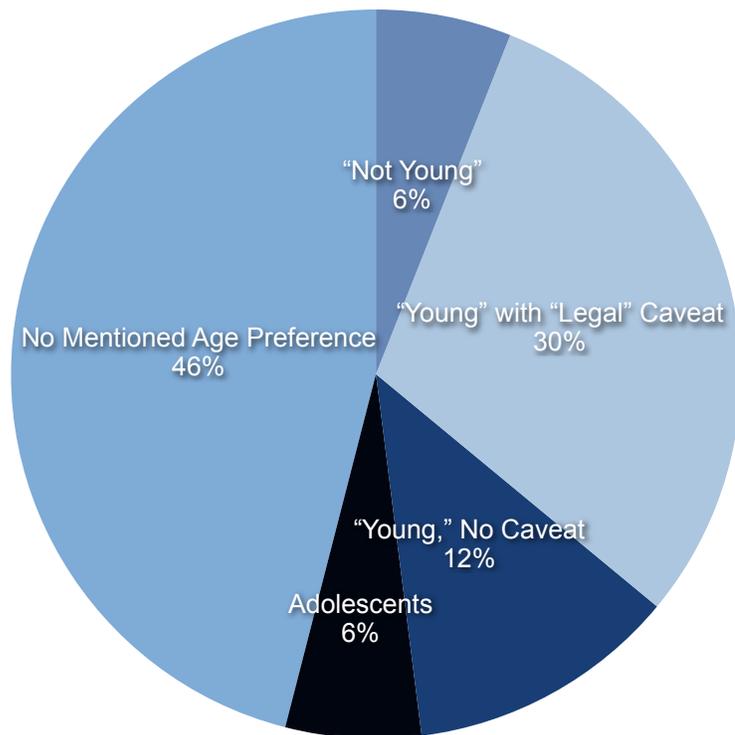
At the other extreme, 6% of these men (3-4% of men who purchase sex overall) stated explicitly and unequivocally that they would prefer an adolescent female. These men embody the “sexual predator” theory of CSEC, and while they total 750 each month using the aforementioned statewide calculations, they are hardly enough men to sustain the commercial sexual exploitation of over 400 adolescent females each month in Georgia.

The remaining 42% of men who responded to advertisements for sex with young females directly shared a preference that the female with whom they have sex be young. This means that 29% of men who purchase sex overall — or 6,000 men per month in Georgia — specifically and directly seek out sex with young females. While a few men voiced the preference as an age range (e.g., “in her early 20s,” or “19-ish”), most men simply used the term “young.” Very few other terms to describe young females were used; a few participants requested the female be both “young” and “petite,” or “dressed like a school girl.” By and large, however, men who want to buy sex with young females simply ask for “young” females. Men of all types in this study were equally likely to state a preference for “young” females, suggesting that young age is equally important to men of all ages and backgrounds who purchase sex.

¹⁷ Source: The Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families CSEC tracking study

Figure 5. How Men Who Respond to Advertisements for Sex with Young Females Refer to Preferred Age

Please remember that the men in this figure — those who responded to advertisements for sex with young females — represent 67% of the larger population of men who pay for sex overall.



Many of the men who asked for a “young” female provided some caveat to their preference that the female be “at least 18” or “legal.” As one respondent said it, “I mean, I don’t want to go to jail or anything.” Nevertheless, 12% asked for a “young” female *without* making any request that she be an adult of at least 18. Considering the strong preference for young age that many respondents voiced when buying sex with a female, it is easy to see how so many men can be involved in commercially sexually exploiting adolescent females, even without necessarily seeking it out.

Implications for Demand-Side Interventions

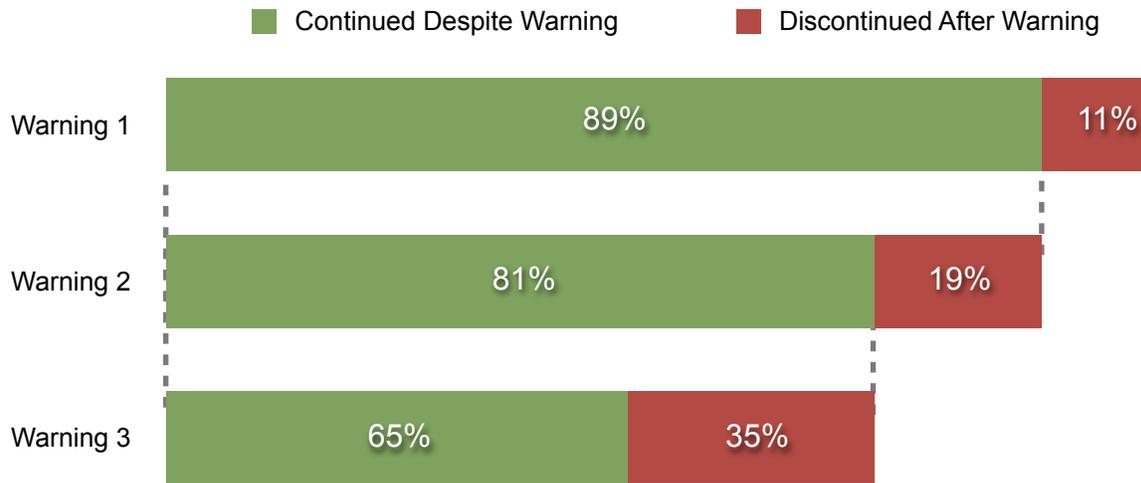
A skeptic might read this far and ask, “Other than the 3-4% of men who purchase sex with females who are looking for adolescents, do any of the men who end up exploiting adolescent females even know this is what they are doing?” We asked ourselves the same question, and devised a mini-experiment to add into the interview that would begin to answer it.

We wanted to know what would happen if we removed the “ignorance” part of the “willful ignorance” theory of CSEC. In other words, if men who want young females *know* that the female is an adolescent, will they still want to pay for sex with her? To test this, we devised a 3-step “escalated warning” procedure that we initiated at the end of the phone call (so that it did not interfere with any other data collected from the participant). The three warnings issued by the operator, in order, are as follows:

1. We’re talking about the really young girl, right?
2. She doesn’t look like she’s 18.
3. I don’t believe this girl is actually 18, and I have no reason to believe she is.

Figure 6 shows the results of this “escalated warning” mini-experiment. Overall, 47% of respondents who were subjected to the mini-experiment continued pursuing the sex purchase *despite all 3 warnings*. Only 11% discontinued after the first warning; of those remaining, another 19% discontinued after the second warning; of those who made it past the both of these warnings, only 35% discontinued following the third and final warning.

Figure 6. Results of the “Escalated Warning” Mini-Experiment



This is also the first part of the study where we see different behaviors based on different specific characteristics of the male — the older the male, the more likely he was to heed one of the three warnings. The younger the male, the more likely he was to ignore all three warnings.

The results of this mini-experiment are harrowing. Nearly half of men who respond to advertisements for sex with young females would knowingly purchase sex from an adolescent female, which means 28% of men who purchase sex overall — or 5,800 per month in Georgia — would do so.

To appreciate the full magnitude of risk to adolescent females, however, we must also factor in the 29% of men who purchase sex overall who specifically and directly seek out sex with young females. In our study there is considerable, but not full overlap between these two groups. Taken together, **42% of men who purchase sex either specifically seek out young females, or are willing to ignore all warning signs that the female they are about to have sex with is an adolescent.**

With just over 4 in 10 men who purchase sex statewide at an extremely high risk for commercially sexually exploiting an adolescent, the task of reducing demand for sex with adolescent females is apparently monumental in size.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This first-of-its-kind study to quantify, describe, and understand demand for CSEC in Georgia paints a clear picture of the adult men who exploit adolescent females by paying for sex with them. The numbers are staggering — 12,400 men each month in Georgia pay for sex with a young female, 7,200 of whom end up exploiting an adolescent female. These men account for 8,700 paid sex acts with adolescent females each month, which means that each adolescent female is exploited an average of 3 times per night.

While many of the men who exploit these victims are not seeking adolescent females per se, the study also shows that just under half are willing to pay for sex with a young female even when they know for sure she is an adolescent. These men are not only abundant in quantity, but are present throughout the metro Atlanta area and the rest of the state. They represent all age ranges and are perfectly comfortable asking directly for young females.

Based on these findings, we recommend advocates make the following considerations in devising strategies to reduce or eliminate the demand for CSEC.

- Local, state, and national lawmakers need to be made aware of the magnitude of the demand for CSEC, as well as the nature of the demand. Advocates need to debunk the myth that CSEC is perpetrated only by a small number of “sexual predators.”
- Unless there is a way to prevent all men from paying for sex with any female, advocates should pursue strategies that educate and encourage men to *avoid adolescents* when they pay for sex. Only 3-4% of men who pay for sex overall are *looking* for the female to be adolescent; the rest are looking to pay for sex with a young female who *they do not need or necessarily want* to be underage. Many men who pay for sex with young females would prefer to know that she is *not* an adolescent.
- Advocates need to continue to educate the public that men who pay for sex with adolescent girls are everywhere, not just in the city.
- Advocates also need an outreach strategy for addressing the reality that men who travel into Georgia purchase sex with young females during their stay. Further investigation is needed in order to understand how exactly this activity transpires in Georgia and how it can be prevented.